

RACES – WHAT IT IS

Founded in 1952, the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) is a public service that provides a reserve communications group within government agencies in times of extraordinary need. During periods of activation, RACES personnel are called upon to perform many tasks for the government agencies they serve. Although the exact nature of each activation will be different, the common thread is communications.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is responsible for the regulation of RACES operations. The Amateur Radio Regulations, Part 97, Subpart E, were created by the FCC to describe RACES operations in detail. Each RACES group is administrated by a state, county, or city emergency services or emergency management organization which is responsible for disaster services. These organizations may sometimes be within another agency such as police or fire. In some areas, RACES may be part of an agency's Auxiliary Communications Service (ACS).

RACES is further sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) through FEMA Civil

Preparedness Guidance, CPG 1-15, March 1991, which provides guidance on developing a RACES group and planning for their use. This CPG is available for viewing/downloading at www.fema.gov/library/civilpq.htm.

RACES in Washington

Within the State of Washington, RACES was established under FEMA guidelines and implemented through the State Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) Plan promulgated in November 1995.

The State RACES plan is available for viewing/downloading at www.wa.gov/wsem. Go to the "Publications" button, then "Plans" button, then click on "RACES Plan."

Basically, the plan provides guidance and responsibilities on how amateur radio, through the RACES program and organizations, can be employed to support state and local government (city/county) emergency operations. In Washington, employment of amateur radio through RACES is paramount during emergencies or disasters where normal governmental communications systems have sustained damaged or are overwhelmed.

Based on the State RACES Plan and as implemented through each city or county plan, amateur radio can be used to support the following needs:

- Back-up communications between state and city/county emergency operations centers
- Back-up communications for E-9-1-1 centers, fire and/or police departments
- Emergency communications for shelters
- Other emergency support as needed

What is the difference between RACES and ARES?

RACES is primarily focused to support government emergency management/services agencies during times of an emergency and/or disaster.

Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) is the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) public service arm for providing support primarily to non-government agencies during an emergency/disaster. A primary user of the ARES is the American Red Cross.

Who Can Participate?

If you are a FCC licensed amateur radio operator, you can participate in the RACES program commensurate with the level of your license.

How Can You Participate?

To participate in the RACES program where you reside, contact the city or county Emergency Management or Emergency Services office.

Indicate to them that you would like to volunteer your services as an emergency worker for emergency communications support.

Based on jurisdictional requirements and procedures you will have to complete an emergency worker registration application and undergo a background check.

Upon approval of the application, you should receive an emergency worker registration and/or ID card that identifies you as a valid emergency worker within the jurisdiction and the state.

Contact your Emergency Management Office for details!



RACES operators are indispensable for emergency communications.

FCC-licensed amateur radio operators can help save lives!

“Serve your community. Volunteer as an emergency communicator!”

Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service



State of Washington

What is RACES and How can you serve?